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PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE ARMENIAN SSR
FOR THE LAST 40 YEARS

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by R. S. Parsadanyan

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FOREWORD

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[Following is the translation of an article by R. S. Parsadanyan in Azerbaydzhanskiy Meditsinskiy Zhurnal (Azerbaijan Medical Journal), No. II, Baku, Nov. 1960, pages 56-59.]

Care of public health in the Armenian SSR was almost completely reorganized during the first years of the Soviet regime. It required many efforts to achieve victory in the struggle with the epidemics -- the cursed legacies of the past -- which were at that time present and numerous. Thanks to the organization and decisive measures of this struggle, the young Soviet public-health service was successful in not only checking the further development of epidemics but, step by step, it attained success in reducing the number of infectious diseases.

Among the many epidemic diseases, the most important were typhus, children's infections, malaria, and many others, which caused great losses for the Armenian people.

High mortality was caused not only by typhus and children's infections, but also by malaria, which was widespread throughout many areas of the republic.

It must be explained that in the very first years of establishment of the Soviet regime, special institutions were set up -- tropic stations which led the anti-malaria work in areas which were suffering from this infection. A series of decrees were issued by the government concerning the struggle against malaria; all of society was involved in this. The progress in this field was tremendous; now it has been liquidated as a mass disease. It is enough to show the following: If at the beginning of the Soviet regime in Armenia 35% of the population was infected with malaria, then in 1959, in this republic only six new cases of malaria were registered. This is a great victory for the public-health service in Armenia.

In recent years another infectious disease was sharply curtailed. During the time of the Soviet system

in Armenia, a vast network of sanitary--anti-epidemic institutions were organized which were equipped with appropriate sanitary-bacteriological laboratories. These establishments study questions of hygiene, nutrition, water supply, municipal organization of public services and amenities for populated areas, the organization of anti-epidemic measures, and questions of sanitation of working and living conditions. The number of these establishments increased every year, and presently in the republic there is not one town or area which does not have its sanitary-epidemiological station. The Central Sanitary-Hygiene Laboratory to head the sanitary-epidemiological work was established in the republic in 1927 and reorganized in 1930 into the Scientific Research Institute (presently the Institute of Epidemiology and Hygiene), which, in addition to carrying out scientific research, greatly contributes to the practical care of public health.

In the pre-revolutionary past the number of medical institutions was extremely insufficient, and the only help they could offer the population was of a very low quality. In 1913, in Yerevan Guberniya there were only fourteen rural hospitals and out-patient clinics where only fourteen doctors and the same number of laboratory assistants worked. In the entire province there were 223 hospital beds: 92 in rural areas and 131 in the towns. In Yerevan Guberniya, 72 doctors and 134 medical personnel worked.

Before the Soviet public health service stood this difficult problem: The re-establishment of a medical system -- first of all hospitals and ambulatory-polyclinical institutions. Planned and decisive measures, taken by the organs of the Soviet government, were not slow in producing the beneficial results: in the towns, rayon centers and the rural areas of Armenia a thick network of medical-prophylactic establishments was set up, the number of which grows from year to year. Rayon hospitals were turned into centers of genuine specialized medical aid to the rural population. The number of hospitals and beds significantly increased, and the structure of the totality of beds available substantially changed, as shown by the increase in the number of specialized beds -- therapeutic, surgical, obstetric-gynecological, and children's. Side by side with this, the number of medical specialists increased in all fields.

In 1940 in the Armenian SSR, there were 3880 hospital beds; in 1955 -- 9110; and in 1960 -- 11,510.

In recent years comfortable and spacious buildings for the new hospitals were constructed in Kirovakan, Alaverdi, Echmiadzin, Ashtarak, Artic, Akhta, and other regional centers of the republic. Now there is no area in Armenia where there is not a rayon hospital with 50-100 beds and with the seven basic specializations.

In 1958 in the republic a reform of rural health service was passed: The rayon executive committees' public-health sections were abolished and their functions assigned to the rayon hospitals; and the sanitary-epidemiological stations were joined to the rayon hospitals as departments (otdeleniye). These measures helped to increase the role of rayon hospitals as establishments giving specialized medical aid to the population. In addition to this, in the Armenian SSR in the last years qualitative changes took place in the activities of the network of hospitals, such as, for example, hospital deaths decreased more than 50 percent in comparison with the pre-revolutionary period, and other diseases even more.

In pre-revolutionary Armenia, maternity and child protection was completely non-existent. Even in Yerevan there was not one maternity bed in any hospital; this not only contributed to the high child-mortality rate but in like manner to the origins of maternity diseases and death. In the years of the Soviet regime, in the republic maternity homes, maternity and childrens consultation clinics, and infant-feeding centers were established. In connection with the growth of these institutions, there was a steady development of measures taken for mother and child protection. In 1927 in Armenia, children's nurseries were first set up in factories; in 1928, summer day nurseries were instituted on state farms, and in 1931, they were also made part of collective farms. After the historic decree of the Soviet Government in 1936, "On increasing Material Help to Expectant Mothers, the Establishment of State Aid to Large Families, and the Expansion of the Network of Maternity Homes, Day Nurseries, and Kindergartens," there was great expansion of measures in this area. Factories, along with the organs of public health service, also began to take part in the construction of children's sanitation institutions. The number of spaces in the permanent nurseries in 1960 grew to four times what it had been in 1928; the number of seasonal nurseries in the collective farms also increased significantly.

The construction of new maternity homes underwent a particularly great development. In recent years new maternity homes were built in Yerevan, Alaverdi, Kirovakan, Leninakan, and other places. Presently, in the republic there are 150 maternity homes on collective farms.

The Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology was established in Yerevan for the purpose of aid and scientific, systematic leadership in this field.

From ancient times, Armenia has been famous for its many health resorts. However, their construction began here

only after the establishment of the Soviet regime. Its baneological health spas made very little use of the hypertonic baneological area of Dzhermuk where, in recent years, there has been a great development of new health centers. The unique waters of Dzhermuk, which are analogous to those of the famous resort, Karlov-Vara, give excellent results in the treatment of the digestive tract, muscles, and nervous system.

The health resort of Arzni is famous for its rich medicinal springs which aid those with heart ailments, metabolic abnormalities, and with diseases of the digestive tract.

The mineral-climatic resort of Dilizhan, famous in the Soviet Union for its healing climate for the treatment of tuberculosis patients, attracts special attention. Presently, Dilizhan has several sanatoriums for adults and children; the number of beds in them, increasing each year, today has reached 450.

Recently the new baneological resort of Ankavan was put into operation, the waters of which resemble those of Yessentuki.

In Yerevan a scientific research institute has existed since 1930 for leadership in matters of health resorts and methods of physical treatment.

In the republic there are also the Scientific Research Institute of Roentgenology and Oncology, of Hematology and Blood Transfusion imeni Professor R. Yeolyana, and of Traumatology and Orthopedy, where a famous team of Armenian scientist-doctors carries out its work successfully.

The Yerevan Medical Institute has existed since 1921 (in its first years it was a faculty of Yerevan State University). The Institute has four faculties: treatment and prevention, sanitation and hygiene, pediatrics, and advanced training of doctors. Instruction is carried on in two sectors -- Russian and Armenian.

During the years of its existence, the Institute has given our country more than 4,500 physicians, among which, at the present time, is a large number of doctors (35) and candidates of medical science (more than 200).

In the Soviet Union the names of important scientists are widely known -- Active Member of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences A. Aleksanyan; members of the Academy of the Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences, L. Oganesyanyan, G. Bunatyan, A. Mndzhoyan, and V. Fanardzhyan; Honored Scientist-Professors S. Sharimanyan, T. Mnatsakanyan, A. Agaronov, Kh. Pirumov, and others.

For the training of general medical workers, medical schools are in operation in Yerevan, Leninikan, and Kirovakan.

The number of medical personnel in the republic grows from year to year, as, for example: In 1946 in the Armenian SSR there were 1,270 physicians and 2,628 members of general medical personnel; in 1960 these numbers increased to 3,344 and 9,393 respectively. During the Soviet years, medical schools trained more than 10,000 doctors' assistants, nurses, midwives, and laboratory assistants. Presently in the republic there is one doctor for every 500 of population. Many capitalist countries would be envious of such figures. It is interesting to note that in 1913 there was not one doctor for 17,332 inhabitants, that is only 1/33 of what we have now.

A significant achievement is shown by hospital aid in the level of material well-being of the population: In the republic there are 6.5 beds for every 1,000 people, whereas in 1913 there were 0.24 beds, that is, 1/25 of the present.

Each year the state appropriations for public health service grows: In 1940 expenditures for this in the republic were 56 rubles, 75 kopecks per capita; in 1950 -- 101 rubles, 92 kopecks; in 1955 -- 148 rubles, 40 kopecks; in 1958 -- 180 rubles; whereas in 1913, corresponding expenditures per capita were 19 kopecks.

For care of public health in 1945, 112 million rubles were appropriated; in 1950 -- 175 million rubles, in 1955 -- 223 million rubles, and in 1958 -- 311 million rubles.